

ELK ARCHERY ADVISORY COMMITTEE
SUMMARY REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS
November 10, 2008

On March 13, 2008 the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) Commission instructed FWP staff to assemble a nine member diverse advisory committee to further assess the recently passed elk archery regulations in 23 hunting districts outside the Missouri River Breaks. A call for nominations was initiated with nearly 40 respondents. Nine members were selected in an effort to represent landowners, outfitters, sportsmen and women, local government and businesses. Residents as well as nonresidents were represented, as was a diversity of Montana's geography. Commissioner Dan Vermillion and an FWP representative would also participate in committee discussions. The first meeting took place in June with the final and sixth meeting day on October 3. Meetings were facilitated and included "trap line" reports, break-out sessions, informational presentations and general discussion. The meetings were publicly announced with a public comment window available at each meeting.

The FWP Commission created this committee in recognition of contention and continued debate over recent elk archery season structure adoptions in 23 hunting districts for the 2008 and 2009 hunting seasons. In general, these adoptions enacted permits for either sex elk during the archery season wherever either sex elk permits were already in place for rifle hunters. Prior to this adoption, this elk archery opportunity was available on the general elk license in these districts. The permits would be unlimited in 2008 and capped (limited) at 100% of the 2008 application rate for the 2009 season. Season justification included hunter equity, hunt quality, hunter shift, access and management effectiveness relative to objective. Across the 23 districts these elements were present or not to varying degrees. Recognizing the debate, the FWP Commission recognized the potential for the 2009 season to be adjusted via Commission action as or if the committee's products were accepted by the Commission.

While the committee was charged to focus on the elk archery regulations in the 23 hunting districts outside the Breaks, deliberations routinely included the Breaks and other elements of the hunting season beyond season structure (access incentives, block management) as and if access or another relationship was recognized. This report includes recommendations beyond season structure although the committee recognizes season structure was and is the prescribed focus. Throughout the discussions there was a spectrum of advocacies—ranging from support to tolerance to intolerance for the current adoptions. Although full consensus was pursued, it was not obtained relative to the season structure recommendations. While the loss of hunter "mobility" was a significant discussion item, there was also some general recognition that if access were significantly improved (increased), other elements of the proposal (crowding, equity, effectiveness, hunter shift) would likely be indirectly but capably addressed.

At the end of the last meeting, two recommendations were framed. One called for a full return to the 2007 season structure and is captured in a separate "dissent". This was paired with an advocacy to pursue access via means other than season structure and that

any erosion of season structure opportunity should be avoided if only out of fear that such an erosion only leads to more loss. Additionally there was concern for additional poor relations between the sporting community, landowners and FWP. The other recommendation included the following components that could potentially be enacted for the 2009 season.

1. Continue a permit system with the 23 districts grouped into only one bundle. To maximize the quality of data (hunter numbers), it was suggested that each of the 23 hunting districts have its own permit and that permit be valid in any of the 22 other districts. Permits would remain limited but would be capped at 150% of the 2008 permit level.
2. Continue a permit system for the Missouri Breaks units (HDs 410/417, 620/621/622, 700/701) Permits would remain limited but would be capped at 100% of the 2008 permit level to enhance drawing for outfitted clients in 2009 season.
3. Implement the A9/B12 antlerless elk tag for archery on private land in any of the 23 districts outside the Breaks that are currently over objective.
4. Implement a "party application" opportunity for elk archery permits in the 23 districts and in HDs 410/417, 620/621/622 and 700/701.

Other season structure and/or permit elements that were recommended but that may not be available (for process, missing authority or the need for further refinement) for possible 2009 implementation include the following.

1. Award nonresident permits at time of nonresident license drawing.
2. Allow for a person to apply separately for both rifle and archery permits with a first preference to the rifle drawing. If an applicant secured the rifle permit, he/she could also hunt during the archery season with archery equipment.
3. Allow for a person to hold more than two elk permits.
4. Award permits to variable priced licenses if outfitter can demonstrate loss of clientele and if defined access is developed through collaborative process.
5. Explore mandatory reporting options and implement where/if data can be reasonably improved.
6. Allow those non-resident hunters who are awarded licenses from the waiting list to obtain permits even though the normal time for drawing permits has expired.
7. Outfitters in Missouri Breaks units with variable priced licenses would receive 100% permit draw for 2009

Outside of season structure and permit recommendations, there was a recommendation to explore possible "Hunt Club" recommendations.

It was also recommended that any regulation changes made by FWP Commission shall consider all affected interest: sportsmen, landowners, outfitters, communities and businesses."

Enjoying consensus and speaking directly to access and independent of any season structure adjustments, the committee recommended the following points for consideration and/or action.

1. Educate landowners about hunter access enhancement programs and how they might benefit from providing hunter access. Use local people to help educate landowners.
2. Because not all landowners are motivated solely by money, give FWP the ability to negotiate and offer money, licenses, services and other items of value or a combination thereof to induce the landowner to grant public access.
3. Amend the 454 program to include out-of-state landowners; alter the program so that licenses as well as permits can be issued in return for public access, allowing non-resident landowners to participate in the program.
4. Give FWP the flexibility to negotiate public access lengths of time on a ranch to the landowner's interests can be addressed.
5. Given this enhanced flexibility, obligate FWP to proactively approach landowners to explore obtaining additional public access.
6. Using reasonable criteria, give FWP the ability to evaluate the Block Management properties at reasonable time intervals so they can:
 - a. Assist landowners with ideas about how they might improve their land and consequent hunting opportunities;
 - b. Weed out those properties that no longer provide good hunting opportunities.
7. Give FWP the authority to spend all funds generated by Block Management program on Block Management properties.
8. Provide FWP with additional sources of funds (such as increased conservation license fees) to provide a stable and increased amount of funds for obtaining public access. Work to gain support from sportsmen to support a legislatively produced enhancement fee.

The committee also recommends the short-term and defined continuation of this or a similar committee. Its primary focus would be continued assessment of the archery season in these areas and the pursuit and digestion of additional relevant data.